

PROGRESS IN PUBLIC MORALS.

That the world grows better as it moves down the centuries we would all like to believe. As each generation looks upon its own times there seems much to disappoint and discourage. Evil is ever present, and is flagrant and noisy and persistent. We do not always recognize the more quiet and modest advance of better things that come like silent tides and affect the sentiments and ideals of bodies of people.

The moral history of the people of America would be a fine subject for study and a story book. The pessimist would find some things to encourage him in his dark and hopeless views. The love of money has continued to be a root of all kinds of evil. Graft in public office, high and low; conspiracy to defraud the people in all manner of combinations; wickedness among the rich and pretentious; the widespread decline in respect for the Sabbath; the decay in family sanctity and the seclusion and happiness of the home; the denial of the authority of God's law and the rejection of the Bible as a supernatural revelation of the divine will and love. One could readily make a long catalogue of evils that are common and threatening. Sometimes the very foundations of moral order in human society are assaulted, and we grow fearful and despairing.

But there is another and brighter side. Looking back over the moral life of the American people, certainly some forms of evil have been shaken off. The conscience of the people has in some things been educated, and informed, and general public opinion has been created and expressed firmly in law.

The duel, for example, once an appeal to the judgment of God, and then an attempt to secure personal satisfaction for an injury outside of the law, was very prevalent throughout the land through the last century. Men of the highest standing in public life were duellists; Hamilton and Clay and Randolph and Andrew Jackson and Benton. Congressmen, naval officers, old and young, legislators, editors thought to avenge insults and settle private disputes by taking life with sword or pistol. But long ago the common law was interpreted to rule that a life so taken was murder, and that principal and seconds were alike guilty. Most stringent laws in all the States have both expressed and educated opinion, and duelling has been utterly exterminated.

The lottery had very general use for many years, from the earliest settlement of the country. The State government used it. Colleges were founded, hospitals erected, roads constructed and churches built, and all manner of small and local enterprises were promoted by the lottery. But the conscience of the people came to see that it was robbery, a species of gambling under fair pretense, demoralizing and destructive. The State constitutions now prohibit the legislatures from legalizing the lottery in any form, and participation is a crime against the order and wellbeing of the body politic.

Gambling, the gaming for money or any other property, once common, sometimes public, and generally consented to, is now universally disapproved. Formerly the common law did not interfere with gambling so

long as there was no fraud. But now the laws prohibit all gaming for money or any other profit, and gambling is vigorously prosecuted and punished.

Profanity, and all blasphemous speech once very common is now an offence against law and the public good, is an indictable misdemeanor, is under the ban of public sentiment, and in large degree has been driven from use, certainly among decent and respectable people.

Out of this steadily rising power of the public conscience has come the great movement throughout the land for the utter destruction of the drinking saloon. Just as surely as duelling and the lottery and gambling have become unlawful and criminal, will the saloon be exterminated. The Church and the Bible are teaching the people, Church membership is increasing, Christian character is strengthening, Christian manhood growing firm and forceful, and the good fruits are enjoyed by all the people.

THE SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

The emphasis placed by many people upon what they call "the social mission of the church" leads to a misconception of the primary end of the church. This primary end is witnessing. She is to tell the world of Christ. By her organization, by her faithfulness to the truth, by her pure and consecrated life, by the use of the ordinances intrusted to her as means for the edification of her members and for the greatness, clearness of her testimony, she is to hold up Christ everywhere and to offer Him to dying men. In doing this she is making a magnificent and effective contribution to mankind's social interests, but the latter are not to be her first aim or thought. The power of personal faith transforms the individual, and through the individual it affects also the aggregation of individuals in the mass, and brings about what some call "social redemption," but this "social redemption" is only an incident to the faith. Faith grasps Christ, in the atonement which he has made. It sees only him. The betterment of humanity is merely one of the happy results coming from the faith.

It is this obscuring of the great purpose of religion and this undue elevation of the idea of the betterment of society that is causing so many to speak lightly of the church, to declare that she is failing, or even to denounce her because in some cases she is not making of herself a great benevolence society. If it be true that her end is the production of a better environment for men, then in many cases she is failing. The idea unhappily pulls the church down to the level of human organizations and causes her to be judged by their standards. The idea, too, savors of commercialism. It seems to say, so much religion produces so much civic and social results. The results are worth the price; so, pay the price; be religious. The whole scheme of grace is turned into a species of endowment insurance and men are persuaded to believe because it will pay. The projection of this upon the larger plane of humanity does not relieve it of its evil as applied to the individual.

This misconception opens the door to those, who accept it, to all manner of unwarranted relations on the